

Examining IEPs of English Learners with Learning Disabilities for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

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Effective education of English learners (ELs) with learning disabilities requires special educators to deliver culturally/linguistically responsive instruction within the context of special services, embracing the interaction between exceptionality and diversity. A critical concept is the notion that cultural and linguistic features are mandated by law to remain integral to teaching and learning once ELs are appropriately placed for special services. We examined a sampling of IEPs for ELs receiving special education for learning disabilities for cultural/linguistic responsive features to inform instruction. We found from our pilot study that the IEPs contain little to no reference to ELs' diverse linguistic and cultural qualities to (1) meet legislative mandates, and (2) guide delivery of appropriate special education. Practitioner implications for developing culturally and linguistically responsive IEPs are provided to support educators who teach ELs with learning disabilities.

For over 40 years, federal legislation has mandated that students with learning disabilities representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds with varying levels of English proficiency be provided with special education that incorporates both language and content development, which should be documented on the learner's Individualized Education Program (IEP) (See PL 94–142; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Furthermore, when the student is an English learner (EL) with a learning disability, legislative mandates require that school districts (1) consider the learner's language needs as these relate to the IEP, and (2) inform parents of the EL as to how language instruction programming meets the IEP objectives. Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) “requires that the IEP team consider, among other special factors, the language needs of a child with limited English proficiency as those needs relate to the child's IEP” (DCL, 2015, p. 26–27).

Over the past several decades, researchers have documented the need for educators to facilitate relevant curricular access for all diverse learners, with and without disabilities, highlighting the significance of meeting federal mandates by incorporating cultural and linguistic strengths and

qualities into teaching and learning (see Cummins, 1986; deBettencourt, Hoover, Rude, & Taylor, 2016; Hoover, Baca, & Klingner, 2016; Ortiz, Robertson, Wilkinson, Liu, McGhee, & Kushner, 2011; Tharp, Doherty, Echevarria, Estrada, Goldenberg, & Hilberg, 2004). Specifically, culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) education “recognizes and uses the students' culture and language in instruction and respects the students' personal and community identities” (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008 p. 3). Though the literature includes many definitions of and explanations about CLR instruction (see Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Gay, 2010; Hoover, Klingner, Baca, & Patton, 2008; Kosleski, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995), most value the features of diverse students' backgrounds, languages, heritages, and ways of learning. It is important to note that CLR education for diverse learners with disabilities is both mandated through federal legislation and articulated in various leading documents designed to guide meaningful interpretation of legislative directives (e.g., DCL, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Collectively, these sources inform the research examination of IEPs for cultural and linguistic responsiveness. This article provides a summary of a research project that examined existing IEPs for ELs

for evidence that legislative mandates are being met, thereby contributing to CLR special education.

A primary goal of this study is to draw attention to, and address the need for, making certain that the IEPs of ELs with learning disabilities meet legislative mandates so that CLR special education is delivered along with continued English language development. To accomplish this goal, we summarize pilot project findings from an ongoing line of research in which we examined existing IEPs for ELs with learning disabilities in two school districts for evidence of cultural and linguistic features necessary to meet legislative mandates and effectively educate ELs. We begin with a brief review of literature about special education and ELs, followed by a description and findings of the pilot project, leading to discussion and practitioner implications for developing responsive IEPs for ELs with learning disabilities as required by law.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationally, approximately 50 percent of the culturally and linguistically diverse population represents students acquiring English as a second or other language (Navarrete & Watson, 2013). The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015 stresses the importance and role of language and language development in the educational programs for ELs and other diverse students. Whether educated within a dual language program, bilingual education structure, or English as a Second Language (ESL) model, the role of both native and English languages is foundational to providing quality education to ELs (see Klingner & Geisler, 2016; Ortiz et al., 2011). In addition, a *Language Instruction and Educational Program* (LIEP), recently reaffirmed in ESSA, stipulates that language and content objectives are equally essential to the education of diverse students who are second language learners. LIEP structures also maintain the significance of incorporating both native and English language usage into teaching and learning. Other researchers also provide guidance on the delivery of culturally responsive instruction and language development (see Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

ELs and Special Education

Watkins and Liu (2013) wrote that “English language learners (ELLs) with disabilities represent an increasingly larger segment of the K-12 student population in the U.S.” (p. 2), estimating that 8–9 percent of students placed in special education are ELs. In support, Lo (2013) concluded that “as our U.S. population continues to get more diverse, the number of English language learners (ELLs) with disabilities continues to grow” (p. 30). Unfortunately, in many instructional environments for ELs with a disability, English language development becomes supplanted by the delivery of special education, as many educators often erroneously believe that meeting disability needs takes precedent. For example, Brusca-Vega and López (2011) wrote that “in some cases, language services were not addressed on IEPs based

on the mistaken belief that students could not receive both bilingual/ESL and special education services” (p. 4). Though cultural and linguistic factors cannot be the primary reason or cause contributing to a learning disability, recognizing diverse strengths, qualities, English language proficiency, and ways of learning remains essential to making certain that appropriate special education is delivered in the least restrictive environment for ELs as mandated by IDEA (2004).

IEPs and ELs

A special education student’s instructional blueprint is reflected in the IEP, which should provide guidance to special and general educators in ways of teaching necessary for providing sufficient and appropriate opportunities to learn. The regulations that accompany IDEA clearly state the components that must be addressed in an IEP. However, less guidance is provided as to how these components should be developed, often resulting in wide variance regarding the nature and quality of IEPs. IDEA’s regulations also specify that teams must consider certain special factors in relation to developing an IEP for a student. One of the factors most relevant to the research summarized in this article is consideration of English proficiency. The regulations state: “in the case of a child with limited English proficiency, consider the language needs of the child as those needs relate to the child’s IEP” [§300.324(a)(2)(ii)]. The implication of this mandate is that all relevant elements of an IEP must be sensitive to linguistic needs of ELs.

Review of literature indicated a limited number of studies that examined aspects associated with ELs’ IEPs, with select relevant research summarized in Table 1.

As shown, select projects address the mandated IEP aspects associated with assessment, accommodations, and parent engagement necessary to meeting the combined needs of language development and special education. Until such time that additional research is conducted and published to best understand the development of IEPs for ELs with learning disabilities, this scant literature provides some guidance concerning IEPs for ELs.

For example, Paneque and Barbeta (2006) found that teachers reported a pervasive lack of ability to determine appropriate instruction and use of available resources for teaching ELs with disabilities. Other researchers document the importance of delivering instruction that considers language needs as well as differentiations to address disability needs of diverse learners (e.g., Hoover, Klingner, Baca, & Patton, 2008; Klingner & Geisler, 2016; Sacco, 2017). As far back as 2002, researchers Artiles and Ortiz (2002) wrote that an IEP for ELs should document how “Instruction needs to address both their linguistic and cultural characteristics and their disabilities” (p. 7). The dearth of research in this topical area is best summarized by Park, Magee, Martinez, Willner, and Paul (2016), who wrote that “little is known about how to best design and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to support ELLs with disabilities” (p. 2), supporting the need for this pilot project.

TABLE 1
Research Projects Investigating IEP Features for Diverse Students
with Learning Disabilities

| Article Title | Description and Relevance to IEP Development |
|---|---|
| Accommodating Students With Disabilities on State English Language Proficiency Assessments (Albus & Thurlow, 2008) | Research project summarizing findings from a national study that examined state accommodation policies for English learners (ELs) with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, on state assessments; Findings identified numerous appropriate accommodations that may be relevant to ELs with learning disabilities when developing the IEP |
| Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents' Perceptions of the IEP Process: A Review of Current Research (Wolfe & Duran, 2013) | Review of research findings that focused on the perceptions of parents of CLD learners in the IEP process, including recommendations to improve family engagement in the IEP process |
| Promoting IEP Participation: Effects of Interventions, Considerations for CLD Students (Griffin, 2011) | Research review of numerous intervention studies documenting positive effects of interventions on CLD students' IEP participation (approximately two-thirds of the CLD learners were identified with a learning disability) |
| Culturally Responsive Instruction for English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014) | Research study investigating culturally responsive instruction for ELs with learning disabilities, concluding that success in special education for ELs is connected to how well special educators integrate culturally and linguistically responsive instruction with ELs' needs, highlighting the importance of responsive IEPs for ELs |
| Developing Testing Accommodations For English Language Learners: Illustrations as Visual Supports for Item Accessibility (Solano-Flores et al., 2014) | Researchers investigated testing accommodations for ELs, concluding that they benefit from use of illustration-based accommodations as long as sufficient training is provided; use of illustration-based accommodations may be relevant to include on ELs' IEPs when documenting appropriate assessment accommodations |

IEPs and Cultural and Linguistic Responsive (CLR) Instruction

Existing research continuously demonstrates that CLR education is required to shape sufficient and appropriate opportunities for ELs (Gay, 2010; Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Kosleski, 2010; NCCRESt, 2005), including instruction in both general and special education (Hoover, Baca, & Klingner, 2016; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). Regarding special services, Rodriguez, Carrasquillo, and Lee (2014) stressed the importance of native language support within the context of special education, stating that bilingual learners with disabilities require “appropriate language support to develop the academic, linguistic, social, and affective domains of learning” (p. 101). Additionally, cultural and linguistic

theories of competence in teaching and learning state that effective educational progress for ELs is best achieved when learning is (1) relevant; (2) situated in a meaningful context; and (3) based on joint, productive activity (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009; Tharp et al., 2004; Vygotsky, 1980). Both first and second languages should be seen as critical capital that educators draw upon to bring about substantive and lasting academic and social-emotional growth (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). “Ultimately, the most effective interventions for culturally and linguistically diverse students will come from bringing together diverse perspectives and from careful examination of notions about disability and culture” (NCCRESt, 2005, p. 1).

Foundational to effective special education of ELs with a disability is the need to deliver special services within the context of culturally/linguistically responsive instruction. Consideration of English proficiency, as mandated by IDEA, and recognition of cultural factors that affect successful learning outcomes is essential to accomplishing the goal of properly developing IEPs for diverse learners.

CURRENT STUDY

This project examined existing IEPs of ELs educated in special education for a learning disability during the 2015–2016 school year. Researchers reviewed IEPs for the purpose of responding to one research question: *To what extent do existing IEPs for ELs placed for a learning disability include CLR material?* As indicated in the review of literature, federal mandates require development of appropriate IEPs, which, for ELs, must include attention to culturally and linguistically diverse qualities, strengths and needs. Several existing sources identify key features necessary to ensure that an EL's IEP meets federal mandates by incorporating CLR best practices (see Burr, Haas, & Ferriere, 2015; DCL, 2015; Klingner, Boele, Linan-Thompson, & Rodriguez, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). For example, the EL Toolkit (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) contains several items specific to IEP development for ELs that attend to English proficiency levels “in listening, speaking, reading and writing, to support and strengthen implementation of the IEP goals” (Chapter 6, p 11). In addition, Klingner et al. (2014) discussed the importance of continued language supports along with special education, stating that “when ELLs are identified as having LD, their need for instruction in English language development does not end” (p. 1.), while Burr et al. (2015) stressed the importance of meeting legislated accommodations. Drawing upon material in the above and related CLR sources, four of the IDEA (2004) mandated IEP components were examined for cultural and linguistic responsiveness in terms of (1) present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP), (2) measurable annual goals, (3) special factors/delivery, and (4) accommodations. These four IEP components were selected since each represents a topical area that provides opportunity for IEP developers to document cultural and linguistic qualities, features, and examples—a sampling of which is provided in Table 2.

As shown, each of the four selected IEP components provides an opportunity for educators to document relevant

TABLE 2
IEP Features to Address Mandated Components for ELs

| <i>Mandated IEP Component</i> | <i>IEP Features to Include in Component</i> | <i>IEP Sample Statements</i> |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| PLAAFP | Contributions of first and second languages Cultural teachings/values supporting instruction Language development best practices based on learner's stage of second language acquisition (e.g., WIDA Can-Do Descriptors) Use of evidence-based ESL and/or bilingual instructional practices | "Student responds best to directions when provided in native and English languages" "Student's academic progress improves when paired with a Spanish speaking peer during reading instruction" "Student is in stage of second language acquisition that requires extended wait time to process English vocabulary" |
| Measurable Annual Goals | Description of cultural/linguistic conditions under which the student best learns framing the annual goal statement | "Using a Spanish-speaking peer the student will . . .," "When provided vocabulary in both English and Spanish student will . . ." |
| Special Factors/Delivery | Statement about required English language development (ELD) showing that ELD is maintained during delivery of special education Statement detailing how collaboration among educators should occur to address culturally and linguistically diverse qualities and instructional features in the delivery of special services Consideration of Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) content and assistive technology (AT) needs | "Learner receives 30 minutes per day of ELD" "Special Educator and ESL educator collaborate to include English language supports in the delivery of special services" "Use computerized translation software to support English language vocabulary in content instruction" |
| Accommodations | Identify select cultural instructional features of benefit to the learner for accommodating diverse learning qualities and needs Provide supports to accommodate English development | "Cooperative learning rather than competitive learning" "Increase wait time to allow time to process complex vocabulary" "Initially accept accurate approximations to correct answers to build confidence" |

features and statements that reflect the cultural and linguistic responsiveness necessary to meet federal mandates. These and similar items were used as a guide to examine existing IEPs.

Method

This research is a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012) utilizing the document analysis method, "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). This method is appropriate for this study, given its emphasis on examining themes or categories for specific content (Labuschagne, 2003; O'Leary, 2014) situated on educational documents. In this research, the educational documents analyzed were existing IEPs, with specific attention to the four IEP categories identified in Table 2. The IEPs were examined by special educators, both classroom teachers and university faculty, who possess extensive background and experience in (1) teaching culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learners, and (2) training classroom teachers of ELs with disabilities.

Three researchers completed the analysis of the selected IEPs. Two of the professionals possessed an M.A. degree in bilingual/ESL special education, over 5 years teaching ELs with disabilities, and special education supervisory experiences, and both are engaged in post-master's degree special education Ph.D. or certification programs. The third researcher, who is a university faculty member in multicultural special education at a large research university, possesses a Ph.D. in curriculum and special education, with extensive teaching and supervisory experiences working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, with and without disabilities, and with their teachers in districts in several

Midwestern and Western states, including American Indian reservations. Additionally, the researcher in one of the two districts is a special education teacher in the district; however, none of the IEPs developed by this researcher were used in the project, to maintain objectivity and reduce potential bias.

District Sites/IEPs

Thirty IEPs were selected and examined from two school districts. The two districts were selected due to significant populations of ELs, and based on direct contacts and connections previously made and currently maintained by the researchers. Six of the IEPs were collected and provided to the researchers by students enrolled in a graduate special education university methods course taught by one of the researchers at an eastern U.S. university. These six represented District 1, which is a large suburban school district in a Mid-Atlantic state serving approximately 90,000 students with over 26 percent ELs. Twenty-four of the IEPs were selected from District 2, which is a medium-sized district located in a rural community in a Western state serving over 6,500 students with approximately 35 percent ELs. The District 2 IEPs were randomly selected by a district administrator and provided to the researchers. Both districts experience disproportionate representation of ELs in special education and/or the need for providing more adequate special education services to ELs with learning disabilities.

Three criteria were used to select the IEPs for the project: (1) EL with IEP, (2) Placement disability identified as Learning Disability, and (3) Both elementary and secondary levels represented. All identifying information about the students was confidential and/or unknown to the researchers. IEPs reviewed were selected from the pool of IEPs available

during the school year of this project (i.e., 2015–2016). One IEP from District 1 did not meet the qualifying criteria and was eliminated from the analysis. The 29 remaining IEPs represented ELs placed in special education for a learning disability in elementary or secondary grades.

Document Analysis and Tool

Adhering to suggested procedures for document analysis (Bowen, 2009; O’Leary, 2014), the following steps were implemented: (1) Identify type of learner for which IEPs will be gathered, (2) Select appropriate IEPs, (3) Develop tool to guide IEP document analysis, (4) Analyze IEPs using the tool, and (5) Summarize and interpret results. As previously discussed, legal mandates provide guidance in IEP development. More specifically, “in developing an IEP for a student with limited English proficiency, the IEP Team must consider the student’s level of ELP, this includes both second language conversational skills as well as academic language proficiency” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, Chapter 6, p. 11). Consideration of each EL’s IEP was guided, in part, by various questions found in the above U.S. Department of Education document leading to the identification of five themes examined in this research project:

- (1) English language development opportunities;
- (2) Use of both native and English languages to support special services;
- (3) Instructional ESL/bilingual best practices found effective with the learner, such as building background knowledge, increased wait time when responding to a question, drawing on funds of knowledge, pairing with a native language speaking peer, or relevant prior experiences;
- (4) Statements that reflect particular struggles the EL experienced in general instruction prior to referral and placement (e.g., issues with extensive teacher-directed instruction, limited opportunities for student peer interactions, requiring a quick response with limited wait time to teacher questions, or struggles with independent work); and
- (5) Use of accommodations to specifically address disability needs that also reflect attention to cultural or linguistic qualities.

Adhering to the above document analysis steps, the IEPs were examined, searching for evidence reflecting one or more of the five themes. The five CLR topical areas were selected due to their continued importance in the education of ELs, as documented in the above literature sources. These five are not designed to be all-inclusive, and others could be added. However, for purposes of this pilot project, any evidence of the five CLR topics provides initial indications that some attempt was made by the IEP developers to create a CLR instructional plan, as mandated by law.

Using the five CLR topical areas as a foundation, a Document Analysis Tool to examine the four IEP components identified in Table 2 was developed. The developed tool, illustrated in Table 3, identifies the Present Levels category

TABLE 3
IEP Document Analysis Tool

Scale: 0 = None—No statement; 1 = Limited—General reference; 2 = Adequate—Specific reference; NA = Not Applicable

I. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

- ..English learners’ cultural and linguistic strengths documented (e.g., extended wait time prior to responding, making connections to community, use of native language, funds of knowledge to draw upon, etc.)
- ..CLR instructional conditions through which student best learns are documented (e.g., paired with native speaking peer; cooperative learning)
- ..PLAAFP describes student’s English language proficiency level (e.g., WIDA ACCESS level 3; “Developing” stage of second language acquisition)

II. Measurable Annual Goals

- ..ESL/bilingual research-based instructional practices are documented (e.g., use of word walls; sentence stems; visuals to support complex English vocabulary)
- ..English language development (ELD) is incorporated into instructional goals

III. Special Factors/Service Delivery

- ..English language development (ELD) instructional time incorporated in general and special education class instruction is documented (e.g., ELD provided daily in general instruction; 30 minutes per day in pull-out setting)
- ..Extent that special, general, and ESL educators collaborate to support second language acquisition within delivery of special services is documented

IV: Accommodations (Check the following indicated on IEP)

- ..Setting
- ..Presentation
- ..Response Mode
- ..Time/Scheduling
- ..Assignment/Grading Adjustments
- ..Use of native language material
- ..English language support materials
- ..Incorporate native (first) language in instruction
- ..Use of native language peer

that includes three checklist items, and the Measurable Goals and Special Factors/Delivery components containing two items each. The Accommodations section includes five of the more frequently discussed accommodations in the literature (i.e., setting, response, grading, time, presentation) (Polloway et al., 2018), guided by expert recommendations for selecting appropriate accommodations (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), along with four items specific to often needed accommodations based on language proficiency level (Hoover, Baca, & Klingner, 2016; Ortiz et al., 2011). Additional examples and discussion of accommodations may be found in the EL Toolkit (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) and the reader is referred to this document for expanded coverage of accommodations for ELs. As with the IEP components, the items in Table 3 are not designed to be all-inclusive; rather, they are representative samples of features that reflect the five CLR topics.

Researchers reviewed the IEPs using a simple rating scale to reflect the existence of CLR material identified in the Document Analysis Tool (i.e., 0 = None—No statement;

1 = Limited–General reference; 2 = Adequate–Specific reference; NA = Not Applicable). The 0–2 ratings were applied to the items under the three IEP components of PLAAFP, Measurable Goals, and Special Factors/Delivery. The rating of the accommodations provided opportunity to indicate (1) the existence of the selected accommodations to address a disability need (Y/N), and (2) whether the identified accommodation also attended to a cultural/linguistic characteristic (Y/N). Examiners were also instructed to document other relevant items that may go beyond the above five CLR features identified above, if evident. Two of the researchers completed the initial analysis, followed by the third researcher reviewing 10 of the IEPs representing both districts to check for scoring reliability. The third examiner adhered to the same procedures as the initial reviewers completing the tool, followed by comparing the two scores for each IEP. The scores of the third researcher were similar or identical to those of the initial two scorers, demonstrating consistency in scoring the Document Analysis Tool. Since findings from all the reviews were highly consistent, no additional reliability checks were deemed necessary.

Results

Table 4 provides a summary of the compiled results for the 0–2 ratings for each item on the Document Analysis Tools for the three IEP components of PLAAFP, Measurable Goals, and Special Factors/Delivery. Also provided is a breakdown of the students' levels of English language proficiency, as determined by school district annual testing, with both districts using the WIDA ACCESS. The fourth IEP component, Accommodations, was examined at two levels relative to both instruction and assessment: (1) tabulation of the indicated instructional and/or assessment accommodation in general, and (2) tabulation of the indicated accommodation that reflects its use to address cultural/linguistic characteristic(s). These results are shown in Table 5.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

All students' IEPs in this study included ELs at varying levels of English proficiency based on a national English language proficiency test, with nearly all students being in the entry/beginning or developing/expanding stages of English language acquisition. Few IEPs contained reference to culturally or linguistically responsive features in the PLAAFP, Measurable annual goals, or Special factors/Delivery statements. Furthermore, little reference to academic English language and English vocabulary development necessary for second-language learners to progress toward meeting the annual goals was found in the IEPs. In addition, review of the four accommodations specific to effective instruction for second-language learners (i.e., native language materials usage; English language materials adapted for second-language learners; incorporating native or first language during instruction; use of native language student peer) indicated that none were documented as necessary for any of

the 29 ELs, even though, based on their English proficiency levels, attention to these items would assist teachers of the ELs in their delivery of special services. In addition, of the other accommodations typically considered for any learner (e.g., setting, time adjustments, response mode, etc.), none of those indicated on the various IEPs made reference to cultural or linguistic qualities. Unfortunately, these findings illuminate the reality that federal legislative mandates regarding attention to culture and language are not addressed in IEPs for ELs. Specific features identified in the review of literature required by law (IDEA, 2004), interpreted through legislative guidance (DCL, 2015), and articulated in various documents (e.g., EL toolkit, U.S. Department of Education, 2016) were not found in the selected IEPs for ELs.

In addition, results from this research provide important findings for practitioners to consider by highlighting key indicators or red flags that represent an IEP that lacks mandated cultural and linguistic instructional responsiveness:

Red Flag Indicator 1: IEPs for ELs that address only factors typically documented for non-ELs relative to cultural background, heritage, and prior experiences (e.g., little reference to cultural teachings about education, funds of knowledge, preferred ways of learning, etc.);

Red Flag Indicator 2: IEPs for ELs that contain little or no equitable attention to language (e.g., IEP is devoid of statements that highlight a learner's second-language acquisition level or instructional language needs);

Red Flag Indicator 3: IEPs for ELs that lack reference to research-based bilingual/ESL teaching practices found effective at helping ELs properly access curriculum in both general and special education settings (e.g., sentence stems, word walls, building background knowledge, making connections, use of native language, etc.);

Red Flag Indicator 4: Upon reading an EL's completed IEP, it is unclear to another professional not involved in its development that the student is an English-as-a-second-language learner with a learning disability.

These “red flag” indicators represent deeper issues about IEPs, reflecting the pervasive lack of implementation of legislative mandates necessary to deliver CLR education for ELs with learning disabilities. Readers are encouraged to carefully examine their existing IEPs to make certain that they adhere to the legislative mandates, and where necessary, revise through proper procedures to make certain that the guidelines delineated in federal mandates are addressed.

Overall, the IEPs reviewed do not identify or document select critical mandated CLR features essential to providing ELs sufficient and appropriate opportunities to learn, including making adequate progress toward meeting measurable annual IEP goals. The lack of cultural/linguistic attention in IEPs, as found in this research, draws necessary attention to this important IEP limitation, which in turn informs implications for practitioners developing and/or delivering IEPs for ELs with a learning disability.

while simultaneously mastering annual goals to address a learning disability need.

Principle 8. The disconnect between policy and practice is very evident from the research findings, indicating the need for state and local education policy to increase emphasis on professional development in order to help special educators become more informed regarding the legislative mandates regarding IEPs for ELs—knowledge and skills that in turn would facilitate development of documents reflecting required attention to cultural/linguistic mandates and best practices relevant to ELs with learning disabilities.

Though each of the above principles reflects quality instruction for all ELs with learning disabilities, principles 6 and 7 represent considerations that are more unique to individualization, and therefore educators should examine these on an EL-specific basis for best results. In addition, the study results provide support for Principle 6, which promotes collaboration among special and ESL/bilingual educators to properly develop and implement an IEP for ELs. The lack of attention to mandated features required to support a CLR IEP is very evident from this research, and increased collaboration among educators may increase the possibilities of greater compliance and CLR education. For example, when teaching ELs with disabilities, Klingner et al. (2014) wrote that “providing special education for ELLs with LD will require collaboration among the various teachers and support personnel in a school” (p. 3). Once ELs are properly identified with a learning disability, delivery of both special services and English language development must occur, and collaboration among educators improves the quality of mandated and necessary supports documented in the IEP.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this study is to draw attention to and provide practitioners suggestions about IEPs for ELs with learning disabilities. This goal is most directly accomplished by developing IEPs that incorporate legislatively mandated features discussed in the article, along with application of best practices necessary to deliver CLR education (e.g., sheltered instruction, use of WIDA Can-Do Descriptors, building background knowledge, use of first and second languages during instruction, etc.). This research found that IEPs for ELs with learning disabilities lack attention to these and similar features that shape special education instruction so it becomes CLR. This study, though small in scale as a pilot project, shows that existing IEPs clearly lack attention to the culturally and linguistically diverse features, qualities, and strengths that teachers must understand to provide effective special education services to ELs with a learning disability. Specifically, the following conclusions are evident: (1) Few IEPs for ELs contain reference to culturally or linguistically responsive features in the present performance level statements; (2) Annual goals for ELs contain little or no reference to academic language and English vocabulary necessary for second-language learners to progress toward meeting the IEP academic goals; and, (3) Accommodations do not reflect cultural/linguistic values or practices. These

findings suggest lack of attention to cultural and linguistic education documented in the IEP as mandated by legislation, further supporting the need for increased attention to professional development and collaboration in IEP development and implementation for ELs with learning disabilities.

Larger-scale research is indicated by the results from this pilot study to include the following: increased numbers of IEPs reviewed across additional states and school districts with high populations of ELs, and reviewed for evidence of cultural and linguistic responsiveness beyond the select items grounding this pilot project. In summary, project findings and conclusions about ELs’ IEPs challenge all practitioners to remain vigilant in making certain that ELs with learning disabilities are provided with an IEP that serves as a functional, meaningful, and culturally/linguistically responsive instructional tool. Overall, results suggest the need for educators to view CLR education as a type of necessary service delivery structure for ELs with learning disabilities. Additional research is necessary to further examine this concept relative to IEP development and implementation for ELs.

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